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SUBJECT: Thailand: Use of Cell Phone While Driving Prohibited

REF: State 6703

¶1. In response to a demarche delivered per reftel, the Social Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided a non-paper on February 5, 2010, explaining Royal Thai Government activities with regard to cell phone use by drivers. In 2008, Thailand amended its Land Transport Act of 1979 to prohibit the use of cell phones while driving, although with no specific reference to text messaging. Hands-free cell phone use continues to be allowed.

¶2. The Ministry of Public Health prepares injury surveillance data, collected by 28 major hospitals nationwide, which contains information about distracted driving. The use of cell phones is listed among contributing factors, along with the use of alcohol, driving under the influence of drugs or medication, not wearing a seat belt, and not wearing a helmet while riding a motorcycle. These other factors, along with exceeding speed limits, play a larger role than cell phone use in road accidents in Thailand. Prior to major holidays, public relations campaigns attempt to deter dangerous behavior while driving, including the use of cell phones, and analysis of crash data pays special attention to this factor.

¶3. The Royal Thai Government has not yet conducted a study regarding the effectiveness of laws, law enforcement, or other educational efforts to reduce distracted driving in Thailand. Research that has been undertaken already examines the effectiveness of law enforcement on other types of negligent behavior, such as drinking and driving, failing to wear a helmet on a motorcycle, exceeding speed limits, and improper vehicle safety. In 2009, the Royal Thai Police launched a year-round campaign to curb fatalities in road accidents, emphasizing the importance of maintaining driving discipline. Prohibition on the use of cell phones was the last item on a list of ten warnings.

¶4. The Office of the National Telecommunications Commission keeps information on the prevalence of cell phone and text message use in Thailand, but this data is not collated to national injury surveillance data.

JOHN